



ACS final report form

- Complete this form in no more than five pages.
- Attach your final financial report in a separate document and submit it to sfabritius@colleges.org
- Note that portions or the entirety of your final report may be reprinted on the ACS grants webpage.

Name of project lead: Dr. Kelly J. Whitmer
Campus: Sewanee: the University of the South
Project title: Science, Society and the Archives
Today's date: July 16, 2019

I. **Project summary:** *Briefly describe the purpose, intended goals, and major activities of your project.*

This collaborative “Science, Society and the Archives” project leveraged the expertise of scholars across our respective campuses interested in studying science, medicine and technology as historically developing enterprises that are socially and culturally situated. We approached the endeavor with a genuine interest in interdisciplinary and innovative approaches to “Science and Society” curriculum development and undergraduate research. In various ways, the project responded to the following observation, which has become the focus of a growing literature: undergraduates report coming away from their classes energized and with reinvigorated interest when instructors use archival or special collections material to bring into focus larger questions pursued in the course. Our project consisted of three interrelated components, which were also goals because they needed to be created, or developed, during the period of the grant: **A.)** a new, collaboratively taught course, **B.)** an online digital archives featuring teaching and research materials for use in future “Science and Society” courses and/or undergraduate research projects, and **C.)** a “Science and Society” virtual working group and speaker series. Each of these components endeavored to reinforce the importance of archives and special collections as knowledge spaces, which play central roles in our ongoing efforts to study the histories, culture and politics of science, medicine, technology and society.

II. Attainment of goals: *Explain the steps you took to achieve and evaluate the success of each project goal.*

Goal A.) *Collaboratively design and teach a new course called “Science, Society and the Archives” during Easter semester, 2019*

Each project collaborator contributed in various ways to both the design and implementation of the new course. Nicolaas Rupke, who has taught many courses in the History of Science and Medicine over the course of his career, made his syllabi available for consultation before the course began and offered helpful advice. Both DebbieLee Landi and John Quinn also offered suggestions about course content, including the politics of natural history, collecting, fieldwork, the history of archives and the history of the book. Both Quinn and Landi “visited” the course virtually during the semester to discuss their areas of expertise and even specific readings they had suggested for student consultation. For example, Landi joined students early in the semester to discuss relationships of power and knowledge in archives as spaces, including their close connections to state institutions and organizations. She prompted reflection on why archives contain some materials and not others and on the kinds of materials we would be focusing on in our weekly archives visits. She also joined students in later class meetings to discuss printing and its impact on the history of natural philosophy, scientific observation (especially the use of illustrations in various natural historical texts) and science fiction. Quinn joined us to discuss natural history, its importance to ongoing work in field biology and the politics of natural history museums and collecting practices.

DebbieLee Landi worked tirelessly to contribute meaningfully to both the development and implementation of the new course. Apart from preparing her own lectures, she coordinated a visit very early on in the semester by two reference librarians from Davidson, who talked with students about how to do “Science and Society” research. She also identified and interviewed a faculty member in Davidson’s Computer Science program about both the history and future of A.I. She recorded the interview for students, who watched a portion of it in class and engaged in a lively discussion afterwards.

We met our goal of collaboratively designing and teaching this new course! To measure our degree of success in meeting this particular project goal, however, we relied largely on teaching evaluations, which were largely positive. Students seem to have especially enjoyed our frequent visits to the archives and opportunities to engage with these

materials. For example, one student wrote: “I loved how she would change things up in class and take us into the archives almost every Friday. I think seeing archival material in person made the class very immersive and helped us with facilitating discussions and reflecting on the themes of the class. Her lectures were very well thought out and we covered a lot more topics than I expected.” Another wrote: “Professor Whitmer ... presented interesting artifacts in the archives to guide the course, asked insightful questions that inspired thought and was overall passionate about the course, making it much more interesting to learn.”

Some students did express frustration with the virtual visits. For example, one observed: “at times it seemed as though the course was just being taught through video conferences. While it is important to supplement the class with views and perspectives from other archivists, it was a bit too frequent. Other than that, she (Whitmer) communicated the material well and promoted class discussion.” It would have been interesting to learn more from this particular student, and others, why they felt the visits were too frequent and / or what the disadvantages of a virtual course meeting are. Some students seemed quite energized and engaged by the visits in the moment; however, they did not share this feedback on their evaluation forms. The course included a total of 8 virtual visits (each 50 minutes or an entire course session) over the course of the term.

Goal B.) *Create an online digital archives featuring teaching and research materials for use in future “Science and Society” courses and/or undergraduate research projects*

We met this goal, thanks to the help of David Syler, a Computing specialist in Sewanee’s Marketing and Communications Office. The website largely features materials housed in Sewanee’s Archives and Special Collections department and does not (yet) contain updated information about the archival materials students chose to work with for their final research project assignments. The site can be found live here:

<https://www.sewanee.edu/ssa/>

Goal C.) *Develop a “Science and Society” virtual working group and speaker series.*

We did establish a virtual working group and speaker series; however, only the members of Sewanee’s group (Roger Levine, Sarah Naramore, Kati Curts and Kelly Whitmer) met during the duration of the grant period. These meetings were held largely to support speaker-series related planning. Sewanee’s History department hosted the first event in

February of 2019, a research talk by Kati Curts (Religious Studies) called “Saintliness & Science: the Composite Photograph in the *Varieties of Religious Experience*.” The speaker series continued with a visit to campus by Dr. Demetrius Eudell (Wesleyan) in March, who gave a talk on the history of ethnology and scientific racism in the 18th century. It concluded with a lecture by Dr. Erika Milam (Princeton) in April about her new, highly anticipated book: *Creatures of Cain: the Hunt for Human Nature in Cold War America*. The lecture event was organized and jointly sponsored by Sewanee’s Office of Undergraduate Research. Students from the new “Science, Society and the Archives” course were involved in all three of these events and had opportunities to both meet and talk with Dr. Eudell and Dr. Milam during their visits to campus.

III. Impact of project

Explain the impact your project had on relevant constituencies (e.g., students), structures, (e.g., a major program), processes (e.g., community engagement), and/or relationships (e.g., consortial partnerships).

The project had the biggest impact on Sewanee students, who reported learning the most via their encounters with archival objects and special collections materials in the new course. It also made “Science and Society” the focus of a campus wide conversation that culminated in Dr. Erika Milam’s visit to campus in April; in addition to being hosted by our project, she was also our “Scholarship Sewanee” speaker. The endeavor benefitted Sewanee faculty members with research and teaching interests in “Science and Society,” especially those who participated in the working group (Levine, Naramore, Curts, Whitmer). It also prompted intentional reflection and pedagogical experimentation around strategies for fostering more collaboration between archivists, librarians and faculty, especially between Sewanee and Davidson. DebbieLee Landi’s virtual visits to Sewanee from Davidson’s campus were especially well-planned and implemented, always with student learning and engagement in mind. Sewanee students also benefitted from the “Science and Society” session led by Davidson research librarians. Two of Sewanee’s research librarians attended this session as well and came away with several new ideas for involving students and getting them excited about undertaking research. We feel there is a lot of potential for building on these relationships in the future, possibly by building an ACS sponsored “Science and Society” multi-campus initiative that could continue the work we began this year.

IV. Consortial (ACS-wide) value of the project

We feel our project results will continue to strengthen ACS via its ability to educate students, faculty and archives/library science professionals throughout the consortium about the history and politics of scientific work and the power of prioritizing inclusive practices in our teaching and research.

V. Lessons Learned: *Describe the surprises, challenges, and lessons learned during the project, e.g., is there something you are very glad you did or would do differently? Did you face obstacles that called for creative problem-solving? What would have made the project even more successful?*

Two of the biggest obstacles we faced stemmed from the practical, real-life challenges of creating successful virtual learning environments and collaborations. Although opportunities for virtual and collaborative learning are becoming more common, in our experience this semester students took more seriously the learning they did “in person” during Dr. Whitmer’s lectures or in the special sessions in Sewanee’s Archives and Special Collections. DebbieLee Landi in particular expressed frustration with a lack of student engagement during and after some of her sessions and student comments affirmed that some did not take these sessions as seriously as they could have. It was also very difficult to get the “virtual working group” and speaker series component of the project to work in the way we had hoped in the planning stages. Because Sewanee was the primary site for the new project and speaker series, the preferences and life rhythms of Sewanee faculty and students took priority over those of the other project collaborators, making it hard for us to find time to “meet” and to discuss the endeavor beyond email.

VI. Next Steps: *Explain what you intend to do with/how to you intend to use or build on the results of your project.*

Kelly Whitmer will teach the course again and remain in contact with her collaborators at Davidson, Furman and Washington & Lee. She will also continue to develop the website and to update it with information about special collections and archival materials central to the development of future “Science and Society” research projects.

VII. Feedback/suggestions for the ACS grant program (optional)